

The Foundation of Constantinople 261

esting as these legends are, we need seek no further explanation of Constantine's choice than his own good judgment and experience. He was fully aware of the extraordinary natural strength of Byzantium, for his armies had found great difficulty in taking it by assault; the supreme beauty of the site and its many other qualifications for becoming a great capital were manifest to his eyes every time he approached it. Byzantium had long been one of the most renowned cities of antiquity. Even in the remotest times the imagination of the Greeks had been powerfully affected by the stormy Euxine that lay in what was to them the far north-east, guarding the Golden Fleece and the Apples of the Hesperidae, a wild region of big rivers, savage lands, and boisterous seas. Daring seamen of Megara, in the seventh century B.C., had effected a landing at the mouth of the Bosphorus, where Io had fled across from Europe to Asia, turning their galleys up the smooth estuary that still bears its ancient name of the Golden Horn. Apollo had told them to fix their habitation "over against the city of the blind," and this they had rightly judged could be no other than Chalcedon, for men must needs have been blind to choose the Asiatic in preference to the European shore.

The little colony founded by Byzas, the Megarian, had prospered marvellously, though it had experienced to the full all the vicissitudes of fortune. It had fallen before the Persian King Darius; it had been wrested from him after a long siege by Pausanias, the hero of Plataea, when the Greeks rolled back the tide of invasion. In turn the subject and